



Helen Wala

September 5, 1924 - May 22, 2019

Helen Wala (nee Lucas)

Helen's journey out of this world began in earnest this past March and ended on May 22nd, 2019, when she passed away peacefully at home. "Journey" might be the defining word for a life that spanned three continents, and included three momentous journeys, each of which would require that she start anew.

Helen ("Heranoosh") was born in Dacca, India (now Dhaka, Bangladesh) on September 5, 1924, to Armenian parents who had emigrated to India from Persia, along with other members of a very large, extended family. As was common for children of Anglicized families in British India, Helen was put on a train at 5 ½ years old and sent to boarding school five hundred miles away. She attended English-run boarding schools in Assam and later Calcutta, completing her secondary schooling at age 17. At school, Helen excelled in all areas except sitting still and keeping quiet. School was literally her home – it was also where she met two lifelong friends, and where she developed her lifelong passion for literature and the arts; some of her happiest moments were spent on stage. She earned a teaching certificate from St. Bede's College in Simla and went on to teach kindergarten at both her former school, The Pratt Memorial, and at St. Michael's in Darjeeling. During this time, WWII began and in 1941, her father bought a small hotel in Calcutta. The Astoria, which still stands today, was a popular spot for dinner and dancing, and it attracted many servicemen, both English and American. Joe Wala was one such American. Although Helen's parents normally would have frowned upon her dating an American, the family was charmed by his friendly manners.

As WWII ended and India gained her independence, many members of that large extended family began to emigrate across the world. Helen's immediate family made the decision to move to England in 1948. The family would settle just outside of London. Because she had been surrounded by a primarily British view of the world, Helen fell in love with the city, so much so, that it always remained "home" in her heart. Helen continued to teach for several years in Eastbourne, then later attended secretarial school and was subsequently employed by the National Coal Board as a secretary.

Early in 1953, an aunt in Calcutta forwarded Helen a Christmas card addressed to her from Chicago. It was from Joe Wala, the serviceman she'd met five years earlier at the Astoria. Spurred on by her co-worker, she wrote back. She and Joe were soon corresponding weekly and in August of 1953, Helen sailed to America. We still aren't quite sure how he managed it, but Joe persuaded Helen to marry him in October of 1953. They settled into life on the far Northwest side of Chicago, where they raised three children and became firmly embedded in their small community, St. Constance Parish. Having been raised by Anglican nuns, Helen converted to Catholicism and became a devoted member of her parish, becoming president of the women's club, singing in the choir for 35 years, lecturing each Sunday with her beautiful English accent, and eventually becoming the parish school secretary. She later made the move downtown to stints at the Catholic Extension Society and the Archdiocesan Marriage Tribunal. Her last and most treasured post was as the head clerk in charge of the file room in the office of Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, from which she retired in 1997. When Joe died in 2009, they had been married for 55 years.

It would be hard to find someone who met Helen and was not charmed by her. People delighted in her easy conversation and stories of her childhood. An avid reader and keen observer of the world, she enjoyed talking about what she saw rather than what she felt, a tendency reflected in the precisely documented accounts of daily life she kept in her journals. She could do more in a day than most of us do in 2 or 3, and what seemed to drive her was the free time to read, watch the BBC and PBS, or listen to her beloved Opera. She surely read thousands of books in her lifetime and more than once mentioned that she was "rereading all of Dickens." She truly made the most of every minute. She packed it all in — books, theatre, family birthdays, lunch and shopping with friends, trips to see her grandchildren, and trips back to England. There was always time for shopping; despite her protests that she needed to stop buying things, there was always a reason to buy herself a new handbag, or someone a gift. If you dared to mention you enjoyed a particular author, you would eventually find yourself the recipient of everything they had written. She was fortunate to have lived in 3 iconic cities — Calcutta, London, and Chicago — and although she never mastered driving, she was an ardent user of public transportation and never hesitated to take the two buses and the "L" downtown to catch the latest exhibit at The Art Institute, or meet her friends at the Lyric Opera.

Although we lived a great distance away, we came to know and love many of her numerous relatives and friends as if we had grown up with all of them, as she filled our childhood with boarding school stories, and tales of the wide circle of family and friends she had grown up with in India. She demonstrated a seemingly endless supply of affection

for others, as she continued to make new friends into her late 80s and 90s. Late in life, she moved to a retirement community in Huntley, IL, where she referred to her last set of friends as “angels” and we thank them for their friendship and devotion to her. Although we are grateful to have had her with us for so long, it is difficult to let her go, and she will be dearly missed by all who knew and loved her.

Helen was preceded in death by her husband, Joseph Wala; parents, Victoria and Tigran Lucas; twin brother, Hrand Aramais Lucas; a younger brother, Hrand Leo Lucas; and her grandson, James Grimelli.

She is survived by her youngest brother, George Lucas; children, Jane Grimelli (Gary) Baxter, Thomas Wala, and Christine Laskero; grandchildren, Luke (Anissa), Christopher (Jennifer) and Danielle Grimelli; grandchildren, Izzy and Paolo Laskero, and their dad, Daniel Laskero; and 8 wonderful great-grandchildren. Other surviving family members in the U.S. include sister-in-law, Leona (James) Kitora; nephew, James (Kathy) Kitora and family; niece, Carol (Ken Wagner) Fox; niece, Marilyn (Larry) Grandolfo and family; nephew, Ted (Gayle) Wala and family.

She was devoted to her family and friends in England, Canada, and Australia; whom she loved dearly. In addition to her brother George, she leaves behind her niece, Keryna (Jim) Ashworth; nephew, Stephen Lucas; great-nieces Katie (Jack) Clarke & family and Preya Lucas, and great-nephew, Neil (Kelly) Ashworth & family. She remained in contact throughout the years with many of her extended family as well, and although many have since passed, her loss will be felt deeply by cousins, Juliette (John)Bayliss, Peter Arakiel, Malcolm (Veronica Schildt) Blincow, David (Erlene) Arathoon in Canada, and Richard (Sue) Glover in Australia.

A Memorial Mass of Christian Burial will be at 10 am on Sat. June 8, 2019, at St. Mary Catholic Church, 10307 Dundee Rd., Huntley with visitation prior to mass from 9 to 10 am. Inurnment of Cremains will follow in the St. Mary Cemetery.

Cemetery Details

St. Mary Cemetery

Dean Street
Huntley, IL

Previous Events

Visitation

JUN 8. 9:00 AM - 10:00 AM (CT)

St. Mary Catholic Church
10307 Dundee Road
Huntley, IL 60142

Memorial Mass of Christian Burial

JUN 8. 10:00 AM (CT)

St. Mary Catholic Church
10307 Dundee Road
Huntley, IL 60142

Tribute Wall

JG

“ I'm sending my deepest sympathy. Helen was a dear friend and I will never forget her! We shared many good times together.I will remember her in my prayers. May she rest in peace.

Mary Therese Schaefer

Juanita Goodyear - June 08, 2019 at 09:48 PM



“ Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Helen Wala.



June 07, 2019 at 01:19 PM

KA

“ My darling aunt,oh how heart broken i am.I cant believe i wont see or hear your lovely voice again.I have so many memories of you in my life,from the christmas parcels you sent for me and Stephen,two small urchins in London,we were so excited to receive the fabulous american gifts made our xmas's.The mega shopping trips we made together,you liked it you bought it,!,yeh,thats a good shopping companion!Our long long phone calls putting the world and family to right,you doing themost talking!!Your love of the royals,i always knew when there was a royal event you would put in a request for a Hello magazine,oh how i miss you.Keryna xxxxxx

keryna ashworth - June 05, 2019 at 01:27 PM



“ Arrive in Style was purchased for the family of Helen Wala.



June 04, 2019 at 05:28 PM

KC

“ Aunt Helen, my great-aunt and pen-friend. How I will always treasure the letters you wrote to me. The love we shared and expressed through pen and paper, over such a long distance. In the days of internet, Facebook, we, you in your eighties and nineties, me in my twenties and thirties, became old-fashioned pen-friends. How wonderful :) I am grateful to have shared this life with you, even for just a short while. You enriched my life more than you know. You inspired me. You were the guest on honour at my wedding. What a journey. I love you endlessly, sleep peacefully and we shall meet again xxx



Katie Clarke - June 02, 2019 at 02:23 PM

CL

She loved you dearly Katie, and treasured those cards, letters, and photos and your pen-friendship and love. To think this photo was from less than 2 years ago. It would be the last time she would see all of you and I know that it was truly the highlight of her final years. Much love Xx.

Chris Laskero - June 02, 2019 at 03:36 PM

DP

“ My deepest condolences to the Wala family. I was in high school when I met Helen and Joe through my parents, who were part of Helen and Joe's social circle at St. Constance parish. As a Northwest side girl, I especially enjoyed hearing Helen's lovely English accent! My husband and I were graced with Helen and Joe's attendance at my wedding and reception, which was on May 22, 36 years ago. Thank you for the lovely tribute that you shared about Helen's life. May she rest in peace. Deborah Paras

Deb Paras - May 31, 2019 at 07:27 PM

CL

Deb, what a sweet memory. Thank you so much for sharing that. What were your parent's names if you don't mind me asking in case I remember them? What a coincidence on the date of your wedding. People would always tell her how much they loved when she was lecturing because they loved her accent.

Chris Laskero - May 31, 2019 at 08:46 PM